Michigan State Police Forensic Science Division Status Update – September 2014

Case Backlogs and Turnaround Times

Since 2009, the average turnaround time for case completion in the Michigan State Police (MSP) Forensic Science Division (FSD) has been significantly reduced. Over the last two months, the FSD has reached their MSP Strategic Plan objective of achieving an average turnaround time of 30 days across all disciplines.

The FSD's next focus will be to achieve a 30-day turnaround for each individual discipline. The table below shows the current backlogs and turnaround times as of September 1, 2014, for each discipline.

	Biology (DNA)	Controlled Substances	Firearms Toolmarks	Latent Prints	Toxicology Blood Alcohol	Toxicology Drug Reports	Trace Evidence Quest. Docs
Case Backlog	1,758	2,034	1,091	495	172	1,047	189
Average Turnaround Time (days)	49	22	65	17	6	79	62

Plan to Reduce Backlog

Beginning in February 2014, the Toxicology Unit at the Lansing Forensic Science Laboratory outsourced 1,856 drug report cases to a private vendor. The outsourcing project was completed in July 2014. This effort greatly reduced the unit's backlog and allowed for a more timely delivery of services to all law enforcement agencies and the courts.

In addition to outsourcing, the FSD has also implemented a nationally trending analytical process to examine sexual assault cases through the use of Y-STR screening. (Y-STRs are Short Tandem Repeats found on the male-specific Y Chromosome). This technique is more precise and takes a fraction of the time required for traditional biological screening. For controlled substances and toxicology casework, the FSD has purchased hydrogen generators to begin transitioning to the use of that gas instead of helium for utilization in required instrumentation. This technology will result in improved instrument run times during casework analysis. For example, a traditional run time of 45 minutes in a toxicology drug case will be cut to approximately 20 minutes. With nearly 40,000 cases being conducted annually between these two disciplines, the time savings will significantly improve turnaround times and increase throughput. The completion date for division-wide transition to hydrogen is expected in the spring of 2015.

Staffing Levels

In FY13, the MSP was appropriated monies to hire 20 new scientists. Nineteen of these scientists were hired into the FSD across all disciplines and one scientist was hired in the CODIS Section of the Biometrics and Identification Division. The last of these scientists were hired in July 2013. Once these scientists are trained to competency (projected to occur by December 2015), the FSD anticipates it will provide forensic services that average a 30-day turnaround time in all disciplines.

With the recent passing of HB 5445, it is anticipated the FSD may require additional scientists to handle the increased volume of sexual assault kits being submitted to laboratories for analysis.

Summary

The FSD has finally stabilized its operations following the unexpected closure of the Detroit Police Department Crime Laboratory in 2009, which resulted in an immediate backlog of over 20,000 cases. Funding restored to the MSP's budget has allowed for an adequate number of scientists and technicians to be hired and trained to meet today's demand for services, allowed for equipment and instrumentation to be purchased, and allowed for necessary facility improvements to be made to laboratories. All of these efforts have resulted in a nearly 65 percent reduction in case backlog from 2009. With sustained support, forensic services within Michigan will continue to improve to a level that will meet the demands of the courts and law enforcement.